

VZCZCXRO0459
PP RUEHCI
DE RUEHKA #1933/01 3470406
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 130406Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5802
INFO RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 9446
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0446
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 8332
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 1077
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0627
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0080
RUEKDIA/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASH DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 DHAKA 001933

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DCHA/OFDA FOR ROBERT THAYER
AID/W FOR AA MARK WARD AND ANE ANNE DIX
DEPT PASS TO SCA/EX
DEPT PASS TO SCA/PB
DCHA/FPP FOR MATTHEW NIMS AND PAUL NOVICK
ROME FOR FODAG
BANGKOK FOR RDM/A TOM DOLAN, ROB BARTON
KATHMANDU FOR USAID OFDA BILL BERGER AND SUE MCINTYRE
TREASURY FOR ELIZABETH WEISS AND SUSAN CHUN

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: Trip Report- from Barisal through SidrQs destruction to
Khulna

REF: DHAKA 1921

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Three weeks after cyclone Sidr struck Bangladesh, the response has transitioned from the critical first phase, which included U.S. military aircraft assisting in relief supply movement, to the second phase, which will be more centered on longer-term rebuilding and economic rehabilitation. After ensuring all U.S. military personnel safely departed from Barisal after the Civil Military Operations Center there closed, Emboff and FSNs traveled west to Khulna, detouring through some of the worst hit areas to gain first hand information. Confirming previous assessments, Emboff saw that brick/concrete structures, including cyclone shelters, had mostly survived; while at seemingly randomly dispersed location, corrugated iron sheet structures sustained damage ranging from minor to total destruction. Aid was evident in many areas, as well as medical care. Fresh water supply was not considered a problem in the short term, but sanitation and long term solutions will require substantial rebuilding. Shops and markets had goods on their shelves, but many interlocutors from both GOB and aid communities expressed fear that unless the economy is restarted soon, a Qrelief mindsetQ will arise where standing in line replaces daily labor as the primary method of supplying individualQs and familiesQ needs. END SUMMARY

Leg 1 - Barisal city to Pirojpur (western edge of Barisal division)

12. (SBU) Traveling mostly west-southwest, we began by tracing the northern edge of the most severely effected areas. Some damage was evident at seemingly random intervals, with certain areas losing many large trees and almost all corrugated iron sheet dwellings, while other areas nearby had much less visible damage. At the Kaukhali ferry crossing immediately east of Pirojpur, one of the ferries (capable of handling an estimated 10 or 12 vehicles, plus pedestrians and bicycles) was beached at least 100 feet from the river. The locals we talked to said that the river rose to 20 feet above normal, but the shops food shops concentrated at the ferry

landing are in concrete buildings and were not substantially damaged; they had, however, received government aid. Fishing is the main activity in the area, and there were some small boats visible fishing out on the river when we crossed at 0800. Fishing nets were seen in several locations strung across canals, a good sign that some economic activity is returning to the area.

13. (SBU) We crossed with various other aid agency representatives on the same ferry, including "Hands On Disaster Relief," a U.S. based NGO. Its survey team was coming from Kuakata, on the extreme southern coast of Barisal division, and the team reported that the embankment there had sustained substantial damage. Crossing the river, there was more obvious damage immediately beside the river's west bank, but shortly the damage returned to the same pattern of patches of serious damage interspersed among patches of little to no apparent damage.

Leg 2 Q Pirojpur to Morelganj (heading south into the most affected areas)

14. (SBU) We began to see more aquaculture farms, such as shrimp hatcheries, as well as regular rice paddies, as we turned south. When we reached Boloi Bunia Union on the northern edge of Morelganj upazila, we saw a CARE water purification unit in operation. According to the CARE employee responsible for the unit, it was delivered the day after the storm and is capable of producing 4,000 liters of water per hour. We also met Union Parishad Chairman Abdul Haim, believed by all in the village to be the oldest chairman in Bangladesh at 80 years old. He was personally overseeing distribution of lime for water treatment and tickets for other relief materials. He reported that residents are in relatively good shape, with good NGO activity in the area and the GOB's Vulnerable

DHAKA 00001933 002 OF 003

Group Feeding (VGF) program coming online shortly. Soldiers from the Bangladesh Army's 55th Division were also present at a nearby location.

15. (SBU) Continuing south into Morelganj, we met representatives from the GOB's Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) at the ferry crossing to Morelganj city. They confirmed that the water treatment plants supplied by DPHE, CARE, Save the Children, Muslim Aid, and the Bangladeshi military have alleviated the short term drinking water problem, but the DPHE's Pond Sand Filter (PSF) systems need substantial rebuilding and new tube wells will need to be drilled. In terms of sanitation, they were very sad to report that only six months ago this had been a showcase of sanitation, with 100% of the district certified as covered by sanitary facilities; now 80% of those are damaged.

16. (SBU) Across the river, in Morelganj city, we visited a Bangladesh Army medical center and landing site of multiple U.S. military helicopter relief missions. Major Nasir commands the 10th Field Ambulance in the 66th Division, deployed from its usual post in Rajshahi to Morelganj for cyclone response. The medical team there still sees injuries, fractures and traumas resulting from the cyclone, but as expected, these are decreasing and regular chronic complaints are replacing direct cyclone injuries. Major Nasir showed a well-stocked facility and said he was receiving good GOB support, but noted a need for vitamins and injectable antibiotics. He also complained that Sharankhola upazila to the south had half the population of Morelganj, and while it suffered more destruction, the number of people affected also should be taken into account when allocating relief.

Leg 3 Q Morelganj to Sharankhola (furthest south, maximum destruction)

17. (SBU) Proceeding through the mostly rural area south of Morelganj city, for the first time we saw a brick building partially destroyed. The building had been part of a private 'college' providing elementary and vocational education to 1,100 students. Approximately 1,500 square feet of what had been corrugated iron buildings were simply gone, leaving only the foundation slab

behind. The school, on its own initiative, has rigged tents and is continuing classes and even end of year examinations. The man I spoke with claimed they have not yet received any GOB aid, either at the school or at his home, which was also destroyed, beyond a promise to repair educational institutions. He seemed to be in a mild state of shock, sitting in what had been the administration building and far less animated in his speech than ordinary Bangladeshis.

¶8. (SBU) As we continued south, we started seeing more of the GOBQs elevated cyclone shelters, which seemed to have all sustained only minimal damage. The roads here had a great deal of traffic, including trucks, various aid agency vehicles, and buses filled with people; we also passed many trucks filled with goods heading north as well as south, presumably indicating that some commerce was still continuing from this area.

Leg 4 Q Sharankhola (southernmost point of our trip)

¶9. (SBU) We arrived in Sharankhola as Bangladeshi soldiers and a member of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society worked together to unload boxes of World Food Program aid that had been transported by truck from Barisal airport. The boxes were stored, along with other relief materials, in a complex of buildings which had attracted a large crowd waiting for relief goods, even though this was only the storage facility, not an actual distribution site. Proceeding around the corner from the complex, the contrast was shocking as we walked into a regular bazaar in full swing, with produce and other

DHAKA 00001933 003 OF 003

merchandise readily available and shoppers making purchases.

¶10. (SBU) Major Shaheen, the officer of the 55th Division responsible for that area, agreed that the first phase of the response to Sidr had been completed and the initial shock largely had been mitigated. The second phase was now keyed on continuing relief only to the absolutely distraught, while providing the means (and encouragement) to the rest of the population to get back to work. He echoed the sentiment heard from other quarters (Ref A), and visibly demonstrated for us as we walked from the mass waiting for handouts to the busy bazaar, that there were people who were focusing on standing in line for aid instead of working for wages. The solution, as Major Shaheen saw it, is for income production to restart quickly to prevent a 'handout culture' from taking hold. The major said he was coordinating well with various NGOs, particularly the Red Crescent, BRAC, Rupantor (which receives funding from USAID and has one of its local citizen committees active in a nearby Union Parishad) Oxfam, Grameen, Muslim Aid, Shelter Box (a UK NGO) and others.

Leg 5 Q Sharankhola to Khulna

¶11. (SBU) Returning from Sharankhola to the main east-west road, we spoke with a response team from the Far-east Islamic Insurance Company, Limited. Team members said they insured about 1,000 people in Sharankhola and that around half had sustained insured losses to varying degrees. Roads were adequate in all the areas we visited, partly due to removal of felled trees, evident as far as the western edge of Bagerhat district, which has been ongoing since Sidr. We continued to see a wide variety of aid related crews, including both Islamic and secular agencies, as well as various media representatives, including an American independent film crew, throughout the region, even as far west as Khulna.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) In the aftermath of Cyclone Sidr, it appears that the GOB and NGO response has met, by and large, the short-term, emergency needs of most people. The medium- and long-term needs, rebuilding the economy and returning people to normal lives, is just beginning. The success of the cyclone shelters is likely to drive demands for even more to be built, and for those new shelters to be capable of protecting livestock as well as people. Donor synchronization, at

all levels, is still very much a key requirement. There are many actors present in the field whose actions have the potential to duplicate and interfere with each other if left un-coordinated.

PASI